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Viewing cable 07ANKARA1876, TURKEY'S ELECTIONS: AKP EMERGES WITH MANDATE;

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ANKARA1876	2007-07-23 10:00	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S ELECTIONS: AKP EMERGES WITH MANDATE;
FIERCE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4(b),(d)

¶1. (C) Voters across Turkey handed PM Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) a resounding vote of confidence in July 22 parliamentary elections (reftel). Turks rewarded AKP for five years of effective governance, strong economic growth and relative political stability. FM Gul's derailed presidential election also generated "victim" votes for the party. With 46% of the vote, AKP now has a mandate to pursue its economic development and modernization policies, EU membership and political reform for another term. High on the domestic agenda are controversial proposals to rebalance power sharing between the president and prime minister and revise, if not rewrite, Turkey's 1982 constitution. Erdogan was magnanimous in an acceptance speech that hit all the right notes: unity, democracy, stability. His first real test will be choosing a presidential candidate who can bridge the divide between a shattered left and jubilant AKP supporters.

¶2. (C) Turkey's elections were a clear showing of the strength and increasing maturity of the Republic's democracy. The lively campaign, followed by free, open and very well organized voting attest to Turks' commitment to the democratic process. The results reflected the opposition's failure to inspire, motivate and effectively organize a campaign. They were a setback for the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the forces that warned that the secular Republic was in peril. Voters rejected such rhetoric. AKP skillfully parlayed the tactics used to prevent Gul's presidency into votes from Turks who objected to perceived interference in the political process. Secular forces, including the military, may be dissuaded by AKP's hefty win from interfering again, although that cannot be ruled out. Erdogan will need to use all his skill and charm to win their support as he pursues a reform-filled agenda.

¶3. (C) The dust has yet to settle, however. How Erdogan uses his new mandate will determine whether cooperation or conflict will be the tone in the new parliament. Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) deputies make for a volatile mix, which an embittered CHP could easily ignite. Erdogan will need to fully deploy his political skills and pragmatic nature to keep Turkey on a constructive track. He will likely be under intense pressure to "reward" AKP supporters; the challenge will be to balance that instinct against the need to build trust and support among those still wary of AKP's Islamist leanings. Whether Erdogan chooses a presidential candidate through consultation with opposition leaders rather than pushing through an AKP favorite will be a strong indicator of the course he intends to pursue. Despite his victory, AKP does not have the seats to forego cooperation, and will be forced to find allies within parliament.

¶4. (C) The results present real challenges for the opposition. Whether CHP and center-right parties get the public's message and re-group into viable alternatives, with new leaders and fresh ideas for Turkey's future, will play out over the next months. If they can succeed, AKP may have a tougher fight ahead.

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WILSON